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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001707

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: SUNNI IDPS RETURNING TO TAL AFAR

Classified By: NINEWA PRT LEADER JASON HYLAND: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Western Branch Office message.

SUMMARY

1. (C/ REL ACGU) Ninewa PRT Western Branch Office PRTOFFS met on May 29 with the Tal Afar-based committee charged with facilitating the return of approximately 3,100 Sunni families displaced during conflict with the city's Shia majority since 2004. Tal Afar's Mayor Najim and senior representatives of the Sunni and Shia communities agreed that return is possible, estimating that most displaced persons would return if their security were guaranteed and compensation were offered.

800 FAMILIES HAVE ALREADY RETURNED; 3,100 FAMILIES REMAIN

2. (C/ REL ACGU) Immigration officials from Ninewa and Baghdad visited Tal Afar in early 2008 to establish a committee charged with overseeing the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Tal Afar. This committee set up a straightforward return protocol for the IDPs. Mosul migration officials now have the lead on the program and daily direct the work of the committee here. The committee is all-volunteer and includes two City Council members.

3. (C/ REL ACGU) PRTOFFS met on May 29 with the committee. Tal Afar's Mayor Najim and senior representatives of the Sunni and Shia communities participated. About 800 families have already returned from Mosul and other locations with Ninewa, without any compensation, according to the committee; about half of those who have already returned are Sunni and half are Shia. The remaining internally displaced persons (IDPs) are similarly scattered across western Ninewa, Mosul and even throughout the city of Tal Afar and in the many surrounding villages of Tal Afar district. Ninewa Governor Duraid Kashmoula confirmed to PRT Leader that a large number of Sunni IDP families (he estimated about 500 families) have already returned to Tal Afar. He said the movement back to the city has been on the individual initiative of families, and not been orchestrated by the GOI. He said he did not believe that their return would threaten the hard-won security gains there.

4. (C/ REL ACGU) Committee members agreed that the remaining IDPs would return if compensated, though the members estimated that few of the remaining IDPs would come back unless they are compensated. Some of the families living in Mosul have been receiving up to ID 900,000 monthly from the GOI, though local GOI representatives say those funds might run out soon. How much compensation would be needed to induce further returns is a matter of lively debate within the committee, but the two key determinants likely are how

far the family must travel to return and how much the family lost in Tal Afar when it departed. Estimates begin at ID 1 million for the amount needed to entice further returnees. A complicating factor is the possibility that inhabitable homes in Tal Afar may have been taken over by other families.

¶5. (C/ REL ACGU) The committee said most, if not all, of the potential returnees have "registered." They said the registration process involves a GOI immigration office form, validation of the GOI ration card, and vouchsafing of family membership by local police chiefs and mukhtars where the IDPs currently reside. The committee believes the records are complete because there was in the beginning some hope of compensation, which sparked a high level of interest in the program.

¶6. (C/ REL ACGU) Tal Afar Mayor Najim said that bringing back all the IDPs at once could overload essential city services. He stressed that any possible return plan should keep security uppermost in mind. Najim added that compensating IDPs to return is better than compensating them month by month to stay in Mosul, as that monthly stipend does not support a return process. The Iraqi Security Forces could be used to transport people and furnishings, thereby containing costs, Najim suggested. The GOI should consider constructing a new housing development, or "village/suburb" with complete supporting infrastructure, which could accommodate returnees and simplify the process, Najim added. He said there is plenty of land available for this purpose in Tal Afar.

Comment

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¶7. (C/ REL ACGU) While we applaud local and GOI efforts to address this thorny issue in order to enhance the stability of Mosul, we have noted Mayor Najim's caution with respect to security. He is clearly concerned about the potential adverse impact of too-rapid influx of IDPs. In our view, the ideal solution would include comprehensive, albeit expensive, GOI compensation. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM) is starting to look at compensation and shelter issues on the national level (and now has some budget for these activities) but has yet to develop policies and implementation plans. UNHCR is also in the early stages of examining whether it would be able to provide assistance to returning families. While resolution of the Tal Afar IDP issue has a long way to go, the return of some of the displaced families is a sign of confidence in Tal Afar, and is a boost to stabilization efforts in Mosul, where these IDPs are viewed by local citizens as a source of unrest.
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